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MEDIA RELEASE

CATHOLIC COMMISSION FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE (CCSJ)

EVERY CHILD MATTERS

On Universal Children's Day (20 November, 2009), the Catholic Commission for Social Justice (CCSJ) invites everyone to pledge his/her commitment to advancing the fundamental rights of children everywhere. This Day was established in 1954 "to promote international togetherness and awareness among children worldwide" and to promote their well-being.

It is a day for us to remember that every child is a gift from God and that every child matters. If we believe this, we should work tirelessly to create a world fit for children; to act as mentors and role models to them; to ensure that their best interests are the primary consideration in all decisions affecting them. It was Rabindranath Tagore who said: "Every child comes with the message that God is not yet discouraged of humankind".

This year the world celebrates the 20th Anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Let us commit ourselves to ensure that the principles of the Convention become a reality for the nation's/world's children.

The Convention, which contains 54 articles and two Optional Protocols, sets out the basic human rights that all children everywhere have e.g. the right to survival; to develop to the fullest; to protection from harmful influences, abuse and exploitation; and to participate fully in family, cultural and social life.

As UNICEF states: "The four core principles of the Convention are non-discrimination; devotion to the best interests of the child; the right to life, survival and development; and respect for the views of the child. The Convention protects children's rights by setting standards in health care; education; and legal, civil and social services."

T&T ratified the Convention in December, 1991. We have legislation in place to assist us in promoting the rights of our children. Enforcement of legislation will assist in removing obstacles that hinder children's growth and integral human development.

In his 2006-2007 Budget Speech, the Hon. Prime Minister, Patrick Manning said "The Children's Authority will, in effect, function as the guardian of all the children of Trinidad and Tobago." In 2008 the Children's Authority Act was passed and a Children's Authority has been established. Sadly, to date there is still a need for adequate infrastructure to facilitate the effective and efficient workings of the Children's

Authority.

CCSJ is committed to working with our Government to create a nurturing, caring society which strives to inculcate in children the kind of moral and spiritual values that will assist them in making informed decisions and choices in their lives and to participate fully as productive citizens in the political, economic, social and cultural life of our society/world. Let us also learn to listen to our children and ensure that they have a voice in society.

The family unit is the bedrock of society and parents are the first teachers of their children. Let us work together to build strong families in which parents take responsibility for their children and in which children grow in awareness not only of their rights but also of their responsibilities.

CCSJ urges the media and those who teach our children, to play their part in promoting the rights of the child.

CCSJ calls on children to stand strong in the face of negative peer/adult pressure. Say “NO!” to drugs, alcohol, smoking, gangs, pornography, violent video games and such activities that are harmful to the development of good character. Reject crime, violence and the gun and knife culture that threatens to prevent you from realizing your full potential. We pledge to stand in solidarity with you as you face the challenges of modern-day living.

CCSJ is concerned about the number of our young men in particular who are at risk or who have been ‘sucked-in’ to a life of crime. Many of them are behind bars or have been killed. Society has a duty to create policies and programmes that will be both preventative and that will support the rehabilitation of youths who have taken the wrong path. We can reach out and help to reintegrate them back into society so that they can live productive lives.

Let us pray for all children that God will clothe them with His goodness and that they will reflect His love in their lives.

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